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C O N F I D E N T I A L JEDDAH 001904

SIPDIS

RIYADH PLEASE PASS TO DHAHRAN, PARIS FOR ZEYA, LONDON FOR  
GOLDRICH, INR/NESA FOR KIRSCH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/15/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KWMN](#) [SOCI](#)

SUBJECT: WOMEN MAKING STRIDES IN THE ASIR REGION

REF: JEDDAH 842

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL GINA ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY  
FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT. During a June 13-14 visit to the Asir Province, Poloffs met with a number of local women to discuss women's employment in the Kingdom. In Asir, women have long played a role in the public sphere, working as shopkeepers in the local bazaar -- a rare sight in Saudi Arabia where genders are typically separated in the workplace. Although most women in the Asir continue to work in the traditional fields of education, social work, and medicine, the number of women entering the government and private sectors is rapidly increasing, indicating a great desire by women to join the workforce in both rural and urban areas. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

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CIVIL SERVICE MINISTRY FUNCTIONS AS EMPLOYMENT AGENCY  
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2. (SBU) During a June 13-14 visit to the Asir Province, Poloffs met with local Saudis to discuss the role of women in the workforce in Abha and Khamis Mushayt, two cities in southwestern Saudi Arabia. During a meeting, Sa'ad Mohammed Abu Melha, General Director of the Ministry of Civil Services of the Asir region, said that approximately 100,000 Saudis work for the government in Asir whereas over 350,000 are employed by the private sector. In Asir, the Ministry works to place male and female Saudi graduates in government jobs throughout the Kingdom. The Ministry itself has men's and women's sections, which employ 24 men and 10 women respectively.

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LONG WAIT FOR GOVERNMENT JOBS  
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3. (SBU) In a separate meeting with employees from the women's section of the Ministry, Poloffs discussed the issue of female unemployment in the Kingdom. Acknowledging that unemployment is a major problem for women in Asir, the Director of the women's section said that, on average, 500 female graduates per month visit the office seeking government employment. Most women come looking for jobs in the more traditional fields of education and health. Some, however, are placed with other ministries, such as the Ministry of Defense where they work in security at the airport or in other government buildings.

4. (SBU) Estimating that 200 to 300 women are placed on a waiting list each month, the Director stated that the bar is being raised for women to secure employment in the Kingdom. In the past, women needed only a high school diploma or Bachelor's degree to find a job. Now, a Master's degree or Doctorate is often required to be competitive for government jobs. For that reason, women are willing to move to small villages in remote parts of the Kingdom for work. The Director recounted the story of one young graduate from Abha who moved her parents and siblings to a small town on the border with Iraq to take a job as a primary school teacher. The Director said that this woman had put much time and effort into her studies, was desperate for a job upon graduating, and therefore willing to go anywhere.

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HUNDREDS OF WOMEN REMAIN UNEMPLOYED  
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5. (SBU) While the Ministry successfully places hundreds of women in teaching or nursing jobs each year, hundreds of women in Asir also remain unemployed. The SAG does not promise all college graduates a job with the government and therefore, according to the Director, more women are turning to the private sector for employment.

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